

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

- 1 1. A system, the system comprising:
 - 2 a first logic unit to provide a list of service providers to a user, indicating the
 - 3 availability of that provider;
 - 4 a second logic unit to receive the user's selection of a service provider;
 - 5 a third logic unit to attempt to establish a real-time communications
 - 6 connection between the user and a selected service provider; and
 - 7 a fourth logic unit to search a database of service providers for an alternate
 - 8 service provider based on a pre-established set of criteria and to offer the user an
 - 9 option of connecting with an alternate service provider.
- 1 2. The system of claim 1, wherein the fourth logic unit presents the
- 2 alternate service provider if the user fails to connect with the selected service
- 3 provider.
- 1 3. The system of claim 1, wherein the fourth logic unit presents the
- 2 alternate service provider after the user has completed a communication with the
- 3 selected service provider
- 1 4. The system of claim 1, wherein the service provider is an information
- 2 provider.

1 5. The system of claim 4, wherein the information provider's
2 information is provided in the form of a recorded transmission.

1 6. The system of claim 4, wherein the information provider's
2 information is provided in the form of a communication with a live person.

1 7. The system of claim 1, wherein the user's selection of a service
2 provider is received over a telephone connection.

1 8. The system of claim 1, wherein the user's selection of a service
2 provider is received over an Internet connection.

1 9. The system of claim 1, wherein the pre-established set of criteria
2 includes a rate of the service provider.

1 10. The system of claim 9, wherein the rate is determined to be a match if
2 it is within a predetermined range of the selected service provider's rate.

1 11. The system of claim 1, wherein the pre-established set of criteria
2 includes subject matter.

1 12. The system of claim 1, wherein the pre-established set of criteria
2 includes a combination of separate criteria.

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1 13. The system of claim 1, wherein a system administrator establishes the
2 set of criteria.

1 14. The system of claim 1, wherein a user establishes the set of criteria.

1 15. The system of claim 1, wherein the pre-established set of criteria
2 includes a reliability factor.

1 16. The system of claim 15, wherein the reliability factor consists of a
2 ratio of successful connections between service provider and previous users to total
3 attempts between the service provider and previous users.

1 17. A system for establishing a real-time communication connection
2 between two parties, the system comprising:
3 a communications interface; and
4 a controller computer linked with the communications interface, the
5 controller computer having:
6 a first logic unit to provide a list of service providers to a user, indicating the
7 availability of that provider;
8 a second logic unit to receive the user's selection of a service provider;
9 a third logic unit to attempt to establish a real-time communications
10 connection between the user and a selected service provider; and
11 a fourth logic unit to search a database of service providers for an alternate
12 service provider based on a pre-established set of criteria and to offer the user an
13 option of connecting with an alternate service provider.

1 18. The system of claim 17, wherein said third logic unit attempts to
2 establish a real-time communications connection between the user and the alternate
3 service provider.

1 19. The system of claim 17, wherein the real-time communications
2 connections is a telephone connection.

1 20. The system of claim 17, wherein the real-time communications
2 connections is an Internet connection.

1 21. The system of claim 17, wherein the first logic unit provides the list
2 of providers to the user via a web page.

1 22. The system of claim 17, wherein the second logic unit receives the
2 user's selection via the web page.

1 23. The system of claim 17, wherein the third logic unit provides the list
2 of alternate providers to the user via the web page.

1 24. The system of claim 17, wherein the service provider is an
2 information provider.

1 25. The system of claim 24, wherein the information provider's
2 information is provided in the form of a recorded transmission.

1 26. The system of claim 24, wherein the information provider's
2 information is provided in the form of a communication with a live person.

1 27. The system of claim 17, wherein the fourth logic unit begins working
2 only if the third logic unit fails to establish a connection.

1 28. The system of claim 17, wherein the pre-established set of criteria
2 includes a rate of the service provider.

1 29. The system of claim 28, wherein the rate is determined to be a match
2 if it is within a predetermined range of the selected service provider's rate.

1 30. The system of claim 17, wherein the pre-established set of criteria
2 includes subject matter.

1 31. The system of claim 17, wherein the pre-established set of criteria
2 includes a combination of separate criteria.

1 32. The system of claim 17, wherein a system administrator establishes
2 the set of criteria.

1 33. The system of claim 17, wherein a user establishes the set of criteria.

1 34. The system of claim 17, wherein the fourth logic unit offers the
2 option of connecting the user to the alternate service provider after communication
3 has ceased with the selected service provider.

1 35. The system of claim 17, wherein the pre-established set of criteria
2 includes a reliability factor.

1 36. The system of claim 35, wherein the reliability factor consists of a
2 ratio of successful connections between service provider and previous users to total
3 attempts between the service provider and previous users.

1 37. A method comprising:
2 sending a user a list of service providers with their availability indicated;
3 receiving from the user a selection of a service provider;
4 attempting to establish real-time communications between the user and the
5 selected service provider; and
6 offering the user an option to connect to an alternate provider.

1 38. The method of claim 37, wherein the selected service provider
2 designates an alternate service provider in advance.

1 39. The method of claim 37, further including searching a database of
2 service providers for alternate providers who match the selected service provider
3 based on a pre-established set of criteria.

1 40. The method of claim 37, wherein the connection established between
2 the service provider and the user is a telephone connection.

1 41. The method of claim 37, wherein the connection established between
2 the service provider and the user is an Internet connection.

1 42. The method of claim 37, wherein the database is searched and
2 information about an alternate service provider is sent only if the user fails to
3 connect to the selected service provider.

1 43. The method of claim 37, wherein the option to connect to said
2 alternate service provider is sent after the connection between the user and the
3 service provider ends.

1 44. The method of claim 37, wherein the service provider is an
2 information provider.

1 45. The method of claim 44, wherein the information provider's
2 information is provided in the form of a recorded transmission.

1 46. The method of claim 44, wherein the information provider's
2 information is provided in the form of a communication with a live person.

1 47. The method of claim 37, wherein rate is a criterion by which an
2 alternate service provider is matched.

1 48. The method of claim 47, wherein a rate is determined to be a match if
2 it is within a predetermined range of the selected service provider's rate.

1 49. The method of claim 48, wherein the user determines the range of
2 rates that match.

1 50. The method of claim 48, wherein a system administrator determines
2 the range of rates that match.

1 51. The method of claim 37, wherein subject matter is a criterion by
2 which an alternate service provider is matched.

1 52. The method of claim 37, wherein a combination of criteria is used to
2 determine a match.

1 53. The method of claim 37, wherein a system administrator establishes
2 the criteria by which a match is determined.

1 54. The method of claim 37, wherein the user establishes the criteria by
2 which a match is determined.

1 55. The method of claim 37, wherein only service providers that pass a
2 reliability criterion are considered.

1 56. The method of claim 55, wherein reliability is determined based on a
2 ratio of the number of calls answered by a service provider to the number of calls
3 placed to the service provider.

1 57. A method of rerouting a user from a selected service provider to an
2 alternate service provider, the method comprising:
3 giving the selected service provider an option of sending the user to a
4 database of service providers when the selected provider can not be reached;
5 searching the database for an alternate service provider that matches the
6 selected service provider based on a pre-established set of criteria; and
7 providing the user with a list of the matching alternate service providers.

1 58. The method of claim 57, wherein the service provider is an
2 information provider.

1 59. The method of claim 58, wherein the information provider's
2 information is provided in the form of a recorded transmission.

1 60. The method of claim 58, wherein the information provider's
2 information is provided in the form of a communication with a live person.

1 61. The method of claim 57, wherein the user can then select an alternate
2 service provider and be connected to that provider.

1 62. The method of claim 57, wherein the selected service provider
2 receives a pre-established percentage of any commission paid to the alternate service
3 provider.

1 63. The method of claim 57, wherein the service provider is given the
2 option of sending the user to the database when the service provider creates the
3 initial listing with the system.

1 64. The method of claim 63, wherein the default option is to send the
2 user to the database.

1 65. The method of claim 57, wherein the selected service provider is
2 notified of the missed connection with the user.

1 66. The method of claim 65, wherein the notice comes in the form of e-
2 mail.

1 67. The method of claim 57, wherein rate is a criterion by which an
2 alternate service provider is matched.

1 68. The method of claim 57, wherein a rate is determined to be a match if
2 it is within a predetermined range of the selected service provider's rate.

1 69. The method of claim 57, wherein the user determines the range of
2 rates that match.

1 70. The method of claim 57, wherein a system administrator determines
2 the range of rates that match.

1 71. The method of claim 57, wherein subject matter is a criterion by
2 which an alternate service provider is matched.

1 72. The method of claim 57, wherein a system administrator establishes
2 the criteria by which a match is determined.

1 73. The method of claim 57, wherein the user establishes the criteria by
2 which a match is determined.

1 74. The method of claim 57, wherein a combination of criteria is used to
2 determine a match.

1 75. The method of claim 57, wherein only service providers that pass a
2 reliability criterion are considered.

1 76. The method of claim 75, wherein reliability is determined based on a
2 ratio of the number of calls answered by a service provider to the number of calls
3 placed to the service provider.

1 77. A machine-readable storage medium tangibly embodying a sequence
2 of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method comprising:
3 sending a user a list of service providers with their availability indicated;

4 receiving from the user a selection of a service provider;
5 attempting to establish real-time communications between the user and the
6 selected service provider; and
7 offering the user an option to connect to an alternate provider.

1 78. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the
2 selected service provider designates an alternate service provider in advance.

1 79. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, further including
2 searching a database of service providers for alternate providers who match the
3 selected service provider based on a pre-established set of criteria.

1 80. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the
2 connection established between the service provider and the user is a telephone
3 connection.

1 81. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the
2 connection established between the service provider and the user is an Internet
3 connection.

1 82. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the
2 database is searched and information about an alternate service provider is sent only
3 if the user fails to connect to the selected service provider.

1 83. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the
2 option to connect to said alternate service provider is sent after the connection
3 between the user and the service provider ends.

1 84. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the
2 service provider is an information provider.

1 85. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 84, wherein the
2 information provider's information is provided in the form of a recorded
3 transmission.

1 86. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 84, wherein the
2 information provider's information is provided in the form of a communication with
3 a live person.

1 87. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein rate is a
2 criterion by which an alternate service provider is matched.

1 88. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 87, wherein a rate is
2 determined to be a match if it is within a predetermined range of the selected service
3 provider's rate.

1 89. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 88, wherein the user
2 determines the range of rates that match.

1 90. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 88, wherein a system
2 administrator determines the range of rates that match.

1 91. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein subject
2 matter is a criterion by which an alternate service provider is matched.

1 92. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein a
2 combination of criteria is used to determine a match.

1 93. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein a system
2 administrator establishes the criteria by which a match is determined.

1 94. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the user
2 establishes the criteria by which a match is determined.

1 95. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein only
2 service providers that pass a reliability criterion are considered.

1 96. The machine-readable storage medium of claim 95, wherein
2 reliability is determined based on a ratio of the number of calls answered by a
3 service provider to the number of calls placed to the service provider.

1 97. A system for establishing a real-time communication connection
2 between two parties, the system comprising:
3 a communications interface; and

4 a controller computer linked with the communications interface, the
5 controller computer having:
6 a first logic unit to provide a list of service providers to a user, indicating the
7 availability of that provider;
8 a second logic unit to receive the user's selection of a service provider;
9 a third logic unit to attempt to establish a real-time communications
10 connection between the user and a selected service provider; and
11 a fourth logic unit to offer to reconnect the service provider to the user when
12 the service provider signals availability.

1 98. The system of claim 97, wherein the fourth logic unit also offers a list
2 of alternate providers

1 99. The system of claim 97, wherein the user can specify the method by
2 which the service provider is reconnected with the user.

1 100. The system of claim 97, wherein the user can set a time limit on
2 when to reconnect the service provider.